

fied, mosaic-like, whole. The short chapters work evocatively, opening up windows on the key terms chosen – snapshots on the ways in which David Foster Wallace kept returning to our basically distorted ways of connecting to ourselves and to the world and hinting at solutions away from “apocalyptic completion” and into the depth of our embodied, ordinary, local lives.

The result is a redressing of the accusation of nihilism that circulates against Wallace. The Afterword addresses specifically that accusation, represented most notably by Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Dorrance Kelly in the chapter devoted to DFW in their book *All Things Shining: Reading the Western Classics to Find Meaning in a Secular Age*. The Afterword is the most academic part of Miller’s book as it deconstructs detail after detail Dreyfus and Kelly’s take on worshipping and transcendence in Wallace’s overall writerly project. And yet what these final pages articulate is the synopsis of what the thirty sections had been building all along: “Wallace is an amazingly receptive writer. He did have a strong sense for sacred moments [...]. And he did resonate, sometimes painfully, with the most varied and incompatible phenomena that animate our contemporary world. But he didn’t manage this despite being a nihilist. He managed it because he wasn’t one.”

What might be considered too light an approach to such an important topic – the relationship between immanence and transcendence, between our ordinary down-to-earth reality and the other-worldly realm of religion – turns out to mirror – cleverly – the “moment of inversion at the heart of worship” that reads transcendence and immanence as the two sides of the same coin. Miller succeeds in presenting philosophically complex matters in a simple way: here simplification is not synonymous with banality but with essentiality – an approach that might pave the way for non-experts (both in religion and in David Foster Wallace) to want to continue reading.

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Margaret Atwood, *The Burgess Shale. The Canadian Writing Landscape of the 1960s*. CLC Kreisel Lecture Series. Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 2017. 88 pages. ISBN: 978-1-77212-301-2.

Margaret Atwood’s lecture is the tenth in the CLC Kreisel lecture series, which aims to foster better understanding of our complex world through the imaginative and transformative powers of literature. As Atwood is one of

the founders of Canadian literature in its present form, it is fitting that she should be given the honour of giving the tenth lecture in the series.

Atwood describes her lecture as “reminiscence, or rambling talk, or mixed bag of shards collected from the ruins of time”(3). This poetic beginning sets the tone for the entire lecture, which is filled with rich insights into the development of Canadian literature, its context and Atwood’s own role as an icon. *The Canadian Writing Landscape of the 1960s* is about the past: the past of Canadian literature, the past of Atwood herself, and the past of Canadian readers of Canadian literature. Atwood begins by addressing the nature of writing, which depends to a significant extent “on what is being written at any given time”(7). She argues that “today’s poets flower on a subsoil of their dead predecessors. We inherit more than we know” (10).

Why focus on the 1960s, one might ask? The “spaces” so necessary for writers were created in the 1960s, argues Atwood. These “spaces” included unions and private grant programmes and prizes, book tours and book festivals. Atwood remembers that at the very beginning of her writing career, there were still no grants from the Canada Council for the Arts and none that enabled writers to travel, give readings or meet other writers. Neither were there creative writing programmes in universities or high schools. She compares writers’ situation at the time to that of a blank page that “cries out to be scribbled on. It fosters improvisation and invention, and the Canadian writers of the 1960s did a lot of improvising and inventing, because they had to”(20).

Atwood bases her lecture on the metaphor of the Burgess Shale, a geological formation in the Canadian Rocky Mountains that contains fossils of many strange and early life forms. She states:

I have named my re-visitation of the Canadian writing landscape of the 1960s after it, perhaps whimsically: that period is already fossilized, in a manner of speaking, and it does contain many strange and weird life forms, different from but not unrelated to forms we see today (11).

Atwood explains that Canadian writers in the ‘60s wanted to be experimental, quirky, and non-commercial. Writing was not a career but a vocation. There were, she argues, three phases through which writing and culture in general passed during the 1960s-1970s: 1961 was the era of the small and the obscure; between 1966 and 1967, writing became more public through

the emergence of trade paperbacks; and by the 1970s, creative writing programmes were being offered at universities. Canadian literature was born.

Today, new possibilities are on the horizon as the result of the internet and the emergence of self-publishing, online magazines, blogs etc. Atwood's lecture ends with the challenge: 'If you're twenty, you are the age I was in 1960. You're entering your experimental decade. Make new life forms! Create new fossils for future generations to unearth! Plunge in!' (43).

The Canadian Writing Landscape of the 1960s is as informative about the emergence of Canadian literature in the 1960s as it is poetic. Atwood's study is replete with witticisms, poetic descriptions and challenges for present-day Canadian writers. At the same time, it also reflects Atwood's concern not only for the literary but also for the physical environment. Literature has an important role to play in alerting readers to important environmental issues. Books, or "paper dinosaurs" as Atwood terms them, seem to have a great deal of life left in them. While Atwood expresses hope about literature, there is also a clear note of warning about our planet:

I won't risk any predictions about the future of reading, of writing, of publishing, or even of storytelling. Frankly, I think the narrative and poetic impulses can look after themselves just fine, assuming there's still a livable planet to house them. Exactly how the future will unfold won't be up to me, however: it will be up to you (43).

And just how we meet that challenge, of course, is up to us!

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Jørn Brøndal, *Det Sorte USA: Fra Uafhængighedserklæringen til Barack Obama*. Copenhagen: Gads Press, 2016. 432 pages. ISBN: 978-87-12-05289-0.

Jørn Brøndal has written a monumental book about the history of African Americans in the United States from the time of the Declaration of Independence to the end of the presidency of Barack Obama. In a book of four main parts and 13 chapters, Brøndal cleverly chronicles the quest by blacks